

TEN YEARS' PROGRESS:

OR

7

A COMPARISON OF THE STATE AND CONDITION

OF THE

COLORED PEOPLE

IN THE

CITY AND COUNTY OF PHILADELPHIA

FROM 1837 TO 1847.

PREPARED BY

EDWARD NEEDLES.

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This Address has been prepared by a committee of "The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the relief of free Negroes unlawfully held in bondage, and for improving the condition of the African race," and published by its direction.

EDWARD NEEDLES,
SIMEON COLLINS,
BENJ. C. BACON,
STEPHEN BYERLY,
JOSEPH LINDSEY,
JAMES MOTT,
P. WILLIAMSON,
Committee of the Society.

Philadelphia, 11th mo., 1849.

A D D R E S S .

NEARLY three generations of our colored brethren have passed away, since the first attempts were made to emancipate them from the bonds of slavery. For more than a century before that time, their forefathers had been kept in a state of ignorance and degradation; knowing nothing of the laws of their country but from the stripes it inflicted, and very little of the moral law set forth in the Holy Scriptures for the regulation of the conduct of man towards his fellow man. In this condition were many of your predecessors, when the boon of freedom was first conferred upon them; and brought up as they had been, it is not strange that many were addicted to vicious habits. Their friends—the abolitionists—who had been instrumental in liberating them from slavery, anxious for their welfare, labored for their improvement. Committees of the Society were frequently appointed, to visit amongst them, and advise them in relation to their business, conduct and deportment as freemen; and in those times their counsel was always received kindly, and generally followed with confidence.

The enemies of emancipation, taking advantage from the evil conduct of some, were bold in denouncing the whole of the free colored people as unworthy of any favor, asserting that they were nuisances in the community, fit only to fill almshouses and jails. To repel these charges, the Society, at different times, made strict investigation of the numbers of the colored population, and such other subjects as were calculated to show their true condition. These investigations always proved that the colored people, as a body, were not a worthless part of the community, as had been represented. This was particularly the case in 1838, when the Society, at considerable expense and labor, took a census of the colored people of the city and districts, by actual enumeration; inquiring into their condition; in relation to their property, real and personal; their taxes, schools, religious and benevo-

lent institutions ; moral and literary attainments, &c. The results of these inquiries were published in a pamphlet and gave great satisfaction, affording the friends of the colored people strong and convincing arguments against those who were opposed to their enjoying the rights and privileges of freemen. Ten years have passed since the publication of the pamphlet alluded to, and another investigation has been made, under the direction of the Society of Friends, and the result, of their inquiries have also been published. We have been highly gratified by the perusal of the pamphlet ; and, in order to make it more easily understood by our colored brethren, and that they may be benefited by the facts set forth, we propose to make a few extracts from it ; and, by comparing the account given of their state and condition now, with the statement given ten years ago, show the actual progress they have made in relation to the different subjects treated of.

1. *Population.*

The first thing in all these investigations, was to ascertain, as nearly as could be done, the number of colored persons within the limits of the inquiry. According to the census taken by order of the Abolition Society in 1837, there were in the city of Philadelphia and the adjoining districts, a total number of 18,768 colored inhabitants. But it appears now that an error was made in that account, in estimating the numbers living in white families, which, when corrected, would make the sum total 17,061 at that time, exclusive of those in the alms-house, the jails, and shelter for colored orphans ; which were not taken into the account, and would probably have swelled the number to 17,500. By the last account taken by the Friends, it appears, from the reports of the agents employed, that in 1847 there were as follows :—

Living in Colored Families,	16,042
“ White “	3,716
In Moyamensing Prison,	66
Eastern Penitentiary,	83
Alms-house,	277
Shelter for Colored Orphans,	56
<hr/>	
Making a total of,	20,240

This, compared with the former account, shows an increase of colored population of about 2,740, which is only 274 in each year, or 27 to every hundred; while the white population, in the same time, increased at the rate of $37\frac{1}{2}$ to the hundred. Hence it would appear that the colored people have not increased in numbers, within the last ten years, as might have been expected. The Friends who published the pamphlet from which these extracts are taken, say that "several causes have probably contributed to diminish the rate of increase of this population within our city during the last ten years; the chief of which are the mobs of 1842, which drove away many of the people of color; and the great increase of poor emigrants from Europe, who have supplanted them in employments, which a few years ago were altogether in their hands." Another reason is the great disproportioned mortality amongst them, consequent upon the manner in which many of them live, crowded together in cellars, narrow lanes and alleys. The more close and compact the population, so much the greater is the amount of mortality amongst the people.

The foregoing paragraph was written at a time when, to all appearance, you were living in the quiet enjoyment of your peaceful homes—having, in great measure, recovered from the distress you had suffered by the mobs which the Friends speak of as having contributed to keep the colored population of our city from increasing in number, as might have been expected. And now we come to you again, to sympathize with you, to mingle our tears with yours, on account of the late terrible outbreaks of lawless violence to which many of you have been exposed. We are distressed on your behalf, and scarcely know how to address you on this subject. The wrongs and outrages which are heaped upon you, enter into our very souls, and strike us with amazement:—the help of man seems of no avail. What, then, shall we do? Let us, dear friends, each one endeavor to seek for Divine assistance, to enable us to bear all these afflictions. You have had great provocations, for which no excuse can be offered. But we entreat you to endeavor to show, by the manner you treat your enemies, that you are still the magnani-

mous sufferers you always have been. You whose age and experience ought to carry due weight and influence over your younger brethren, endeavor to prevail upon them to restrain the feelings of indignation which may have been excited, which, if given way to, would only induce the wicked rabble by whom they have been assaulted, to commit acts of greater violence. But after this storm of persecution may have passed by, you may safely return to your accustomed pursuits; then the survivors of those who have been the immediate sufferers, may take such legal measures to obtain redress for their loss, as judicious counsel may direct. And hereafter, you who may desire to possess again the right of suffrage, of which, by the present Constitution of this State, you are unjustly deprived, may unite in systematic exertions to procure a repeal of that odious feature of the law, and by perseverance, from year to year, in petitioning the Legislature for a redress of your grievances, success may, and we confidently believe, will ultimately be the result, if you faint not, nor give way to gloom and discouraging appearances.

2. Of Pauperism.

The facts stated in the last chapter, and the opinions expressed, are fully confirmed by a tabular statement on page 24 of the Friends' Pamphlet, the main features of which may be summed up as follows:—Of those residing in the

City	there were 2,562 families, 320 of which recv'd assistance.				
Spr'g Garden, “	202	“	3	“	“
N. Liberties, “	272	“	6	“	“
Southwark, “	287	“	7	“	“
W. Philadel'a, “	73	“	2	“	“
Moyamensing, “	866	“	104	“	“

Here it will be seen that in the districts of Spring Garden, Northern Liberties, Southwark, and West Philadelphia, containing 834 families, only 18 families, or one out of 46, were assisted; while in the single district of Moyamensing, where the number of colored families is 866, 104 of whom require relief from the public, or one family in 8, were on the list of paupers.

“ A remarkable feature in the statistics of the colored

population of Philadelphia, is the difference in the character of the different districts. Thus, with respect to their place of birth, the Northern Liberties (in which is comprised in this census, the district east of Sixth street and all north of Vine street,) contains 14.2 per cent. of immigrants; Spring Garden (which comprises all west of Sixth street and north of Vine street,) contains 31.4 per cent.; West Philadelphia, 34.3 per cent.; Southwark, 35.9 per cent.; Moyamensing, 46.3 per cent., and the city itself 47.7 per cent.

"That some of these immigrants are among the most industrious and thriving of the people of color is shown by the fact, that of the 315 freeholders, the families of 75 are all natives of the state; all the members of 52 of these families were born out of the state, and 184 families are only in part natives of the state. Many of these immigrants are from the adjoining free states, and a large proportion of the remainder have been slaves, who had bought their own freedom, and often that of their nearest relations, and have shown, in freeing themselves from bondage, the energy and industry which have made them useful and respectable citizens.

"Yet it is equally certain, that this part of the colored population is the most numerous in those crowded streets and alleys where the destitution and wretchedness is most intense and infectious, and where the evil effects of herding together in crowded courts and miserable buildings, and the indifference to the ordinary comforts and decencies of life, are most apparent.

"We may fairly trace these extremes in the condition of the colored immigrants to the evil influence of slavery. Upon feeble and common minds it operates like a blight, withering the active principles of our nature, and inducing a listlessness and an indifference to the future, which even should the slave become a freeman, leave all the vicious habits of slavery worked into the very grain of his character. To those on the other hand, who have resisted these withering influences and bought their freedom with the hard-earned fruits of their own industry, the love of liberty often imparts a desire for improvement and a consciousness of their own worth as men, that invigorate all their

powers and give energy and dignity to their character as freemen.

"If we examine the situation of the several districts as regards the personal property owned in them, we shall find a confirmation of these views. The greatest density of the immigrant population is in the city and Moyamensing between Pine and Fitzwater streets, and west of Fifth street and east of Tenth street ; and although it is within these limits that the extreme poverty and distress so often alluded to are found, yet a large number of the most respectable and prosperous persons of colour are inhabitants of the principal streets in this district."

3. *Property.*

The statements in regard to pecuniary matters, given by the pamphlet, are very favorable. The success and prosperity attendant upon the industry and management of the colored people, appear from the following comparative statements.

In 1847. The total amount of real	
estate, as reported by the agent,	\$531,804
Deduct amount of incumbrances,	130,442
	<hr/> \$401,362

In 1837 the whole amount of real	
estate was,	\$322,532
Amount of incumbrances,	12,906
	<hr/> \$309,626
Increased value of real estate,	<hr/> \$91,736

The increasing prosperity of our colored people is next shown by the amount they are paying in rents.

In 1847. The amount of House Rent,	
per Report of Agent,	\$199,665
" Water Rents,	1,132
	<hr/> \$200,697

In 1837. The amount of House Rents,	\$161,008
" " Water "	464
	<hr/> \$161,482

Increase paid in Rents,	<hr/> \$39,225
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And again, by the amount of Taxes paid by this disfranchised people.

In 1847. Amount of Taxes per recent Report,	\$6,308
In 1837. “ “	3,253

Increase of Taxes paid,	<u>\$3,056</u>
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4. *Education.*

The next subject noticed in the pamphlet relates to the Education and Employment of the children. It is assumed by the Friends that “the period between five and fifteen years of age, may be regarded as comprising the children sent to school. While that between ten and twenty comprises those whose services are available to their parents.”

The number of colored children between the ages of 5 and 20, are computed at about 4,500. Of this number it is ascertained that 2,040 are going to school. Of the remaining 2,460, the returns of the agents show the manner in which 1,340 of these are disposed of, leaving upwards of 1,100 minors, between the ages of 5 and 20, who are not reported or accounted for. The concluding paragraph of this interesting chapter is worthy of attention. They say, “When we call to mind that there are more than 1100 children, between the ages of 5 and 20 of whom no account is received, the greater part of whom are probably growing up in idle and vicious habits; it is clear that this is one of the most painful facts brought to light by this inquiry, and one that should promptly engage the attention of the friends of the people of color.”

Our colored friends will bear in mind, that this is a subject which has engaged our most frequent and anxious attention. To show you the views we entertain of its importance in relation to your moral and religious welfare, and consequent elevation of character as a class of society, and as a means of enabling you to conduct your temporal concerns more efficiently; we have often left our homes and our own places of public worship, and attended your different religious meetings. Our object on such occasions was to do you good by setting forth in your hearing such duties as we fully believed to be required of every

person who assumes the charge of a family. Particularly have we urged upon you the necessity of paying stricter attention to the education of your children ; and endeavour to show the responsibility you are under, for the manner in which too many of you neglect to avail yourselves of the advantages you possess in this respect, over hundreds and thousands of your brethren, who, in addition to the untold miseries of slavery, are denied the privilege of reading the Holy Scriptures, and cruelly punished for any attempt to acquire school learning. We have laid before you the lamentable fact of your neglecting to send your children to the schools, which are so liberally provided for them at the expense of the public, in which schools there is constantly room for a larger number of scholars than are in attendance. We have often been grieved, when visiting those schools, to see so many empty seats, that ought to have been filled by children, who are to be seen every day, idling their precious time in the streets, where they learn little else but vice and mischief. We entreat your most serious attention to these matters ; and, as every individual has more or less influence, watch carefully, that you lose no opportunity of influencing your brethren who have not sufficiently considered the importance of these things ; and when you see their children growing up mere vagabonds, try to prevail upon them to be sent to school. In this way you may do great service to your own people, and promote the blessed cause of human progress and freedom.

5. *Beneficial Societies.*

These Institutions amongst the colored people, are noticed by the Friends, in their pamphlet, very approvingly. After speaking of their numbers, the amount of their funds, and the manner in which they are applied, they say, "The large amounts contributed by the members of the numerous beneficial societies for mutual aid, is one of the most gratifying facts brought to light by the investigation which has been made. It is clear that these charitable funds must very considerably relieve the distress attendant on the sickness of the heads of families, and maintain a large portion of

the people of color under privations, and in circumstances which would otherwise throw them upon the public for relief. These societies might become the means of much more extensive usefulness than they yet are. Were they to extend their care to the education of the children of their members, it would involve little or no additional expense; for the public provision in the county of Philadelphia for the education of all, to say nothing of the numerous private charities, would be found ample for all who need this assistance." This chapter of the Friends' Pamphlet affords another subject for congratulation, in the proofs of improvement in the condition of the colored people, shown by the returns obtained from the Alms-house, as compared with that published by the Society ten years ago. Then there were 235 colored paupers, equal to one-seventh of the whole number of those admitted into that institution. Whereas, agreeable to the last investigation, for 1847, only 196, or about $11\frac{1}{2}$ in the hundred, were colored persons; and, compared with the total of admissions for the whole year, but little over 12 in the hundred. Thus it will appear that the number of colored paupers admitted into the Alms-house, has declined considerably. This is the more encouraging from the fact of the prevalence of low fevers amongst the poor and destitute of the colored people, particularly where they were most thickly settled, by which the mortality among that class of inmates of the House was found to be 44 in the hundred; while amongst the white paupers the deaths were only about 14 in the hundred; and it is worthy of notice, that of the colored patients "seven out of every nine were from Moyamensing—mostly cases of low typhus fever."

6. *Morals.*

In relation to the moral condition of the people of color, the investigation made by the Friends in 1847, by careful inquiries at the Prisons, although showing a sorrowful picture of the effects of vice and depravity much to be deplored, yet, upon the whole, manifests a decided improvement over the account exhibited by the report published by the Society in 1837. Thus it is stated, in a

period of five years, from 1829 to 1835, there were admitted into the Eastern Penitentiary 124 colored persons, an average of 25 in a year; in the next five years, from 1835 to 1840, the number had increased to 321, averaging 64 in a year. Since that time the number of colored convicts has decreased. Thus, from 1840 to 1845, there were 209 admitted, being an average of 42 in a year; and from 1845 to 1849 (four years) there were 126 admitted, being a yearly average of $31\frac{1}{2}$; and if we deduct the eleven individuals unjustly convicted of riot at Carlisle, for attempting to rescue a slave, and who were discharged by writs of error, the average would be $25\frac{1}{2}$.

The returns from the County Prison in Moyamensing, afford the same satisfactory results. The average number sent there from 1835 to 1840, was 121; from 1840 to 1845, $94\frac{1}{2}$; the four years following, from 1845 to 1849, there were only a small fraction over $79\frac{1}{2}$ annually.

The Friends' Pamphlet, while treating of the Prisons, presents some other facts, relative to the colored people, well worthy of notice. The first of which relates to education, and affords encouragement to believe that the attention that has been given to that important subject, has produced great benefit, and may well excite our colored friends to greater exertions among themselves, to fill up the schools, so liberally provided at the expense of the public, for all their children. By the accounts received from the records of the Eastern Penitentiary, it appears that previous to 1840, there were 51 colored convicts in the hundred, that could neither read nor write; whereas the proportion of those admitted since that time is only 40 in the hundred. Another circumstance is mentioned, which we allude to in order to excite in your minds more lively feelings in behalf of your unfortunate brethren who are still groaning in slavery, deprived of numerous advantages which you possess; and to show how greatly your condition, even in a moral point of view, surpasses that of the slave. This is shown by the fact, that of the colored prisoners, the largest number have emigrated from the slave states; the proportion being $33\frac{7}{10}$ in the hundred of those from the free states; and $66\frac{3}{10}$ from the slave states.

Another very important subject remains to be noticed,

which, considering that this address, although particularly addressed to our colored brethren, will not fail to be read by many others, who feel deeply interested in every thing which relates to the moral and religious improvement of the colored people, viz. :

7. Places for Public Worship.

In the "Friends" pamphlet a list is given of the names and location of nineteen houses, wherein colored congregations, of different religious denominations, meet. "The returns from only twelve of these (societies) have been received, sufficiently explicit to form a correct estimate of the numbers of colored persons, that are members of those various religious societies. From the return of these twelve congregations, the number of regular members are stated to be 3,974, and of persons usually attending, 6,100. These all have First day, or Sunday, schools, employing 107 teachers, and attended by upwards of 1000 scholars." The comparison between this account of the colored churches and that given in the society's printed report for 1837, is remarkable. The returns made to the Committee appear to have been more complete, having been received from sixteen, being all the colored churches at that time. The number of communicants formed an aggregate of 3,995, being only a few more than were reported to the "Friends" in 1847, from twelve congregations. From the remaining seven places for public worship, there was no account rendered, consequently their condition as relates to the number of members and attendants upon public worship are not stated.

We have now laid before you a plain statement of facts, relating to your actual condition as a component class of the community ; and have shown, by fair comparison with former accounts, how you have advanced in the scale of improvement, within the last ten years, notwithstanding the many obstacles you have to contend against ; and the terrible prejudice against your color, which, like an incubus, seems to weigh you down.

In conclusion, we present to your notice a few extracts from the latter part of the Friends' Pamphlet, which we think well deserving of attention. The favorable opin-

ions which they have formed, after so full and thorough an inquiry into your merits and demerits as a people, we think will be gratifying to you, as they are to us. The advice intended to be conveyed by them, was given with the warmest feelings of benevolence towards you, and we cordially unite in recommending it to your earnest consideration.

Speaking of the manner in which the investigation was made, it is stated that "the statistics were obtained by personal enquiry from door to door, and are as accurate as could be expected. The result is certainly interesting and remarkable. It exhibits a population, to a considerable degree, sober, industrious, and independent; steadily advancing in wealth and social improvements,—supporting from its own resources, charitable and religious associations,—exercising most of the handicraft arts—desirous of education and instruction, and possessing all the elements of civil respectability, and social happiness. The degradation and wretchedness which mark the infected district in Moyamensing, are foreign to the real character of our colored population, to whom it would be doing a gross injustice, not to point out clearly the broad line of separation. Those inhabitants of that district among whom all this degradation prevails, are a mixed assemblage of the lowest and most abandoned of both colors, as much below the general condition of the greater portion of the people of color, as it is below that of the respectable laboring white population of our city.

"Among the great causes of the wretchedness into which these people have fallen, are the unlicensed grog-shops which abound in that district, and the shameless system of swindling carried on under the name of policy offices. These policy offices are places in which tickets are sold at low prices, from 3 cents to half a dollar, guaranteeing to the purchaser a prize corresponding with that which the corresponding ticket draws in some lottery in a neighboring state. It is almost needless to say, that the whole system is in every part a fraud. It is supported by appealing to the credulity and superstition of the people, and the ignorant purchasers have to put up with whatever tale the policy seller finds it convenient to tell.

“Of a large portion of this class of our fellow-citizens, (the colored people,) it may be truly said, that they are steadily advancing in all that constitutes a respectable and intelligent community. They have numerous skilful and industrious artisans and tradesmen,—the desire for information, and the feeling of self-respect are increasing among them; and it is upon the influence of the Christian example and the steady conduct, both as regards industry and morals, of those who have thus raised themselves, and upon their benevolent exertions, that the future welfare and respectability of the people of color in this city, must, as a class in the community, mainly depend. There is no way in which the patriotic man of color can so promote the well-being of his people, as in kindling and keeping alive the desire for instruction.

“The distinction of color, and the prejudices which have grown out of the condition of slavery, are no doubt felt by the man of color to be the principal barrier against his obtaining that social position to which, by his good conduct, intelligence and wealth, he is fairly entitled. There are few things in the world more unreasonable and unreasoning than those prejudices of caste and color. To seek to overcome them by direct opposition, inflames and exasperates them, and has been, in all ages, the fruitful source of civil strife and bloodshed. But notwithstanding this, there is no prejudice which is so sure to die away, under the influence of time and a steady course of virtuous and independent conduct on the part of those who are its object.

“Such as we find our allotment, it is our greatest interest to fulfil the duties which spring from it, to our Creator and to ourselves, to our parents, our children and our family. The respect and esteem of the virtuous of all classes to whom he is known, is sure to follow him, who duly fulfils these, even in the humblest condition of life. The performance of these duties is the only solid foundation on which to build a reputation as a good citizen; in the sphere of one’s own family and friends, all the social virtues and warm affections of the heart find their native and congenial soil.

“Let then the man of color cultivate the spirit of self-

respect and independence, and without allowing his mind to be disturbed by prejudices which cannot be at once removed, pursue that course of quiet industry and unpretending virtue which will make him happy and respectable as an individual, and will contribute more than any thing else to elevate the condition of his people.

“This proper feeling of self-respect would tend to check the disposition so prevalent among many of the people of color, to indulge in love of show and extravagance, in anniversary processions and entertainments, which add nothing to their respectability in the eyes of their fellow-citizens, and foster tastes and habits most unfriendly to the real improvement of the people of color.

“Let the virtuous and good among them never forget, that all the temporal advantages which are here held up to their view, are chiefly valuable as springing from and connected with a sense of religious obligation; and that they can never be permanently enjoyed except among a people ‘fearing the Lord and working righteousness.’”